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1837 Charles Robert Leslie said of his work, when invited to give his opinion, "Your pictures look as if you could blow them away."

This criticism of Sully's work, in the main, is undoubtedly true, and because of this fact, the portrait of General Davis is especially interesting. It shows that Sully could at times, given the proper sitter, muster considerable force as a painter of virile masculinity. The General stands firm, like the dunes at his side, a splendid type of the American hero. If the painter has not given to his face a rugged quality, he has at least given it a fresh and ruddy hue, with a spirited expression. The whole poise of the head and posture of the body suggest commanding strength.

The picture should be compared to Sully's full length portraits of George Frederick Cooke, the actor (1811 and 1819); of Commodore Stephen Decatur, (1814); of Commodore Stewart, (1812); of Samuel Coates, of the Pennsylvania Hospital (also 1812), and of General Lafayette (1824), which are among his best male portraits.

A. E. B.

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## Persian Velvets

**I**N THE important and extensive collection of textiles from Persia and the Near East, recently purchased by the Museum, probably no group is more interesting than the velvets, and certainly none is more attractive to the student of textile design.

If the seat of origin of velvet weaving was not Persia, it was surely some part of the Orient not far removed from there. Hence Persian velvets are interesting from an historical standpoint. Algoud, in his volume, *Le Velours*, says "Arabic is the only language which has a special word to designate velvet, *kathifet*, derived from the name of the town where velvet had been first (?) made. From this fact Pariset [*Histoire de la Soie*] concludes that 'having noted that this word is the oldest which can be found to apply to velvets, and that there was none in the European languages during the Middle Ages which can definitely be said to have been applied to textiles of the nature of velvet, and that all modern names are descriptive of the "piled" appearance [*l'apparence velue*] rather than the textile itself, all this seems to point to the Orient as the place where this rich fabric had its origin.' But how is it possible then to determine exactly where velvet was first made, and to what people shall be given the credit of this invention? Certain authors have attributed it to the weavers of India, but they do not support their statements by citing confirmatory documents. In the opinion of others the origin of velvet was in Persia. This particular mode of weaving was, in truth, especially developed in that country; it is still carried on there, yet there is reason to believe that the skill of the Persian velvet weavers was practiced chiefly from the Middle Ages onward." Algoud

then tentatively suggests China, or rather the people known in classical times as the Seres, because almost from the remotest antiquity the inhabitants of these regions were renowned for their silk goods. Here the question must rest, however, until the much desired proofs are discovered. Suffice it that all Algood says while showing the possibility of a Persian origin for velvet, also emphasizes the supremacy of this country in the production of this prized fabric from the Middle Ages onward, and it is into the latter part of this period that the velvets in the possession of the Museum fall.

The piece illustrated on the cover of this issue we can safely date in the first half of the seventeenth century, it was probably made, in fact, within the limits of the long reign of Shah Abbas (1586-1628). Falke illustrates a velvet of very similar design which he dates about 1630, on the authority of Martin. Ours is perhaps more beautiful, though the design is less free and more conscious, but the conventionalized flower is the same, or more truthfully, both are developed from the same plant. The piece is remarkable for its size as well as for its technical beauty, being about eight feet long and three feet wide; whole pieces as large as this are seldom preserved. The ground weave is three quarters silk and one quarter coarse linen, that is, the weft is entirely silk but the warp is made up of alternate threads of silk and linen. The silk is of a golden yellow and this, combined with the natural linen color, has produced a pleasant honey color, which well sets off the dark and neutral tints of the sharp pattern. The threads of the pile warp are of the purest silk, and the design they trace is most satisfying. Springing from what is apparently a large knotted root, brocaded in silver, is the graceful stem of a flowering plant, a conventionalized member of the *compositæ*, bearing at the base two thistle-like leaves in delicate shades of gray and green, and above these the stem rises, giving off lesser branches, and bears at the top the many petalled flower head which is seen in profile, while on the ends of the smaller branches are similar blossoms represented *en face*. Smaller leaves and buds fill the empty spaces and complete the symmetry of the unit, while from the root a little trailing campanula hangs downward on a dainty stem. This unit is ingeniously repeated in interlocking rows, so that the repetition is not emphasized and the whole is peculiarly effective. Special attention should be called to the cloud motive, derived from the Chinese designers of antiquity, which fills the spaces between the units and harmonizes so surprisingly with the rest of the pattern. Although the silk warp threads of the ground have been weakened by wear and time, and although the colors of the pattern have faded, yet so much of its original charm and splendor remain that this strip after three centuries must still be ranked among the foremost products of the Persian velvet looms.

It is interesting to compare the piece just described with the far

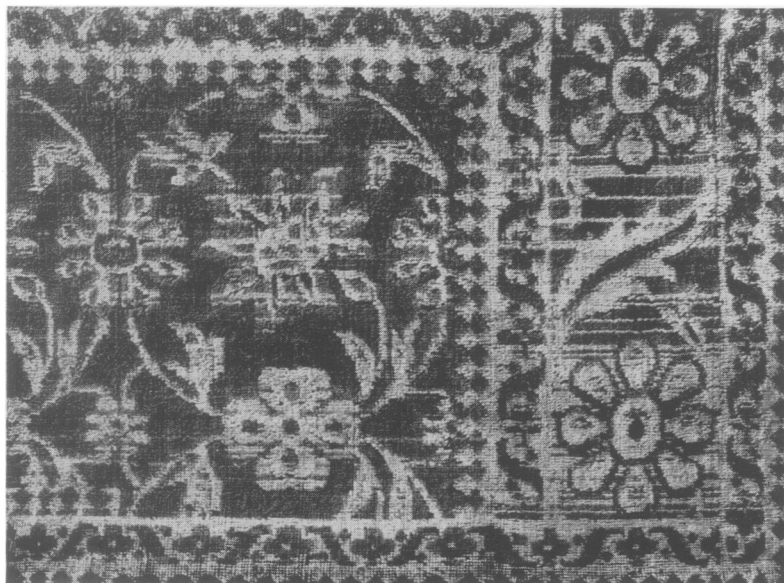
smaller piece illustrated in figure 1. In spite of the fact that the latter is better preserved and that the colors are brighter, it is not nearly so pleasing. One is struck by a certain stiffness in the pattern and by the formality with which the units are arranged, and by the far less successful spotting of lesser motives. For these reasons it would be tempting to date it half a century or more earlier, but it is probably better judgment to consider it the work of some less skillful designer of the same period in which the first was woven. In technical skill displayed there is little choice between the two. The same plant figures in the pattern of both. Although in the smaller piece the knotted root is lacking and the thistle leaves are absent, yet the flower head and the buds and blossoms are recognizably similar. A small and entirely conventional bird, however, is here found on the main branch—one can scarcely say it is perched there for its appearance is rather that of a cut-paper bird glued by its unseen wing to the stem. The cloud motive is again apparent, but much reduced in size, like little commas aimlessly placed. The colors of this piece must be seen to be properly appreciated. The rich blue of the flower stalks and the outlines show vividly on the golden ground, while the delicate salmon pinks, and yellows and greens in the leaves and petals harmonize well with the fine texture of the velvet warp.

The third example illustrated in figure 2, is of unusual quality, and might have been made on the imperial looms at Ispahan at a little later date than the two pieces already described. It is a complete piece, being about four feet long and eight inches wide, and although one end only is shown in the illustration, the same pattern finishes off the other end. Unlike the other two velvets, none of the ground cloth shows; the whole is made up of a closely woven pile. It is strongly suggestive, both in pattern and texture, of the silk rugs of Persia. The pattern is far more conventionalized than those of the two preceding examples, and the treatment of the border motive is particularly interesting. The ground color is rich blue, and on this is traced the pattern in yellow and two shades of red.

Lack of space in this BULLETIN prevents the description of the less important velvets in this interesting collection of textiles. It is hoped to continue this in subsequent issues, as well as treat of the brocades and damasks, which are also unique. H. H. F. J.



**FIG. 1**



**FIG. 2**

**PERSIAN VELVETS**